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### Ohio State Engineer

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# The Engineer's Bookshelf . . .

By WILSON R. DUMBLE

IT is not often that there appears in the book-stalls a new volume that is so utterly compelling in its power and its simplicity that a reviewer is totally willing to cast his lot with the book and go all-out in the way of recommendation. But that is exactly what I wish to do for a thin little war book only of novelette length. Moreover, my decision is not reached upon a minute's notice. I read this volume several weeks ago. I started it late one evening and I finished it in the small hours of the morning. Its action, its characters, its theme, its simplicity were all so overpowering that I have been unable until now to touch it to a typewriter. Hesitatingly I have read what other reviewers have said about the volume; inquiringly I have questioned why they have not given it more notice, more words of praise, more acknowledgment of greatness. All of them seem to admit that it has the earmarks of fineness; but none is too sure to say that it equals in power Stephen Crane's **The Red Badge of Courage**. However, I am willing to say that Pvt. Harry Brown's "**A Walk in the Sun**" is even a greater book than **The Red Badge of Courage**.

If the duties of a novelist are, as we have been told, first to narrate, second to characterize, third to depict a setting, and fourth to expound a theme . . . if these are the duties of a novelist, well, then, **A Walk in the Sun** is certainly as brilliant a piece of work as Stephen Crane's Civil War novel.

"War, without virtue in itself," writes Pvt. Brown, "breeds virtue." It breeds patience in the impatient and heroism in the cowardly. But mostly it breeds patience. For war is dull business, the dullest business on earth . . . The soldier waits for food, for clothing, for a letter, for a battle to begin. And often the food never is served, the clothing is never issued, the letter never arrives, and the battle never begins. The soldier learns to wait meekly, hoping that something will happen. And when the period of waiting is at an end the something that does happen, isn't what he expected. So in the end he learns to wait and to expect nothing. This is patience . . . But he refuses to confess his patience. He curses the fact that he has to wait. He howls at those who cause the waiting. He swears at himself for being such a fool as to wait. And that too is good, in a way. For the man who

waits silently is not a good soldier. He is no more than a stone."

I feel that **A Walk in the Sun** is the most truthful of all the war novels that we have had, because in its single setting it is compact of all the elements which comprise the life of a soldier: tragedy, fear, humor, pathos, the medicine of laughter, the boon of comradeship, the straining of nerves to the very breaking point, and the re-discovery of strength to carry on in the face of devastating odds.

The plot is simple. It is the history of a few hours in the life of one platoon of American soldiers who are making a beachhead landing in Italy. As their landing boat approaches the shore, in the darkness just before the dawn, the leader, Lieutenant Rand, is killed. Without Rand, however, the landing is effected successfully; and the unnerving freak accident of the death of the lieutenant has gone practically unnoticed by his men. They are seasoned veterans of Tunisia and Sicily; they can take it. Ashore, Sgt. Halverson who succeeds the lieutenant, is promptly killed while scouting to find the captain to whom they are supposed to report. Then, as the dawn breaks over the Italian hills, under the leadership of Sgt. Porter, the next in command, the platoon starts to move toward its objective, an enemy machine gun nest located in a farm house some six miles up a winding cowpath. The men are strafed by low-flying enemy planes; a few of them are killed; a few others are wounded and are left lying by the roadside. Half way to the farm house, Sgt. Porter cracks up under the cumulative strain of a year's campaign, and Cpl. Tyne takes over. Cpl. Tyne is wise and steady. He pulls together the few remaining men of the platoon and he keeps them going toward their objective. With rough and ready competence, they dispose of an unexpected German armored car that momentarily threatens total defeat of their assignment. But the remnants of the platoon keep on, invincible now, to the final fulfillment of the mission. That is all there is to the plot: one single thread of story clotted with the blood of the wounded here, knotted with the silence of death there. In its simplicity, the story is not short of overwhelming; in its rhythmized sentences, it reads like a long narrative poem.

Although it is what the men in the platoon accomplish that really counts, nevertheless what

they say is also of vast importance. Listen to Pvt. Archimbeau:

"In the last war, they sent a guy to France. That was all there was to it, they just sent him to France. Then he went home. Simple. Real simple. That's a nice kind of a war to have around. But what do they do this time? Do they send you to France? No, they do not send you to France. They send you to Tunisia, and then they send you to Sicily, and they send you to Italy. God knows where in hell they'll send you after that. Maybe we'll be in France next year. Then we work our way east. Yugoslavia. Greece. Turkey. No, not Turkey. All I know is, in 1958 we're going to fight the Battle of Tibet. I got the facts, bud; I got the facts."

There you have it! That is the fine example of the splendid soldier. God bless him! He waits and growls, and he growls and waits; but when it comes to fighting, "He's a first class fightin' man." He is the G. I. Joe, ladies and gentlemen, who is fighting on the road to Paris this very afternoon; he's the brother of Clare Booth Luce's G. I. Jim, the guy who lived around the corner, the guy who is not coming back. Archimbeau and the others in Cpl. Tyne's platoon are carrying on for G. I. Jim. They covered those six rough miles to the machine gun nest in the old farm house in Italy; and they will get to Paris; yes, and they will get to Berlin.

To catch the author's rhythmic sentences, listen to these two paragraphs, an account of Cpl. Tyne only a hundred yards from the farm house objective:

"Ahead of him he caught sight of a body, dark against the brown grass. He thought that he had been crawling where someone had been before, but he hadn't been sure; a cow might have come through the field. The body must be Rankin. He was possessed of an intense desire to know whether or not Rankin was still alive. He very nearly rose to his feet in his haste to get to the body.

"Rankin was lying face down. With an effort Tyne managed to roll him over, but even as he rolled him he knew that he was dead. A dead body is completely devoid of buoyance. It is a mere lump. Rankin had a hole in his neck and a hole in his chest, and he had holes in his back, also, where the bullets had entered in. His tommy-gun lay beside him. Tyne cast an anxious glance at Archimbeau, to see that he didn't get too far ahead of him, and picked up the tommy-gun. There was blood on it, covering the notches that marked Rankin's kills. Tyne laid his own rifle down beside Rankin and he started clawing again. He took the tommy-gun with him."

Well, there it is . . . or, if you will permit a war cliché: This is it, **A Walk in the Sun**. Expounding a theme, that fourth duty of a novelist of which I spoke a minute ago, is not outstandingly evident. No one can point and say, "The Wages of Sin is Death"; no one can declaim, "Honesty is the Best Policy." But what one can do is to point his finger to every single man in that platoon, and repeat those famous last sentences that Stephen Crane wrote about Henry Fleming in **The Red Badge of Courage**: "He had rid himself of the red sickness of battle. The sultry nightmare was in the past. He had been an animal, blistered and sweating in the heat and the pain of war. He can now turn with a lover's thirst to images of tranquil skies."

There are no heroics in **A Walk in the Sun**; heroic visions fade into ghastly, sickly fear; and then they are rekindled with manly courage which walks arm in arm with each man. Cpl. Tyne's men are tested, they go into the thick of the fight, they go indeed into hell; and they come back again, steadied and sobered and quiet, wearing a new and a manly serenity. And that is theme enough for me.

Pvt. Harry Brown's **A Walk in the Sun** has all the elements that go to make it a great book. It has the unqualified endorsement of this reviewer.

Beg, borrow, or steal it; it's a great little book!

I had a lot of fun several days ago looking over a roistering collection of Army and Navy songs recently published in a book called **G. I. SONGS**, and edited by Edgar A. Palmer. There I found the old timers that were sung in France twenty-five years ago; of course they are dressed up to suit the situation today, but nevertheless they have the old flavor of mess kit and barracks. One can't forget those days; nor can one forget those songs. In **G. I. SONGS**, you will find the contemporary versions of **MADELON** . . . and ah what a gal Madelon was . . . and the contemporary versions of the **MADEMOISELLE FROM ARMEN-TIERES**.

You recall the **MADEMOISELLE**, don't you?

You might forget the gas and shells,

But you'll never forget these mademoiselles,  
Hinky-dinky- parlez-vous?

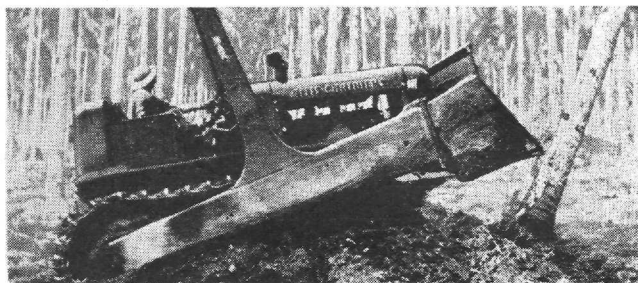
Also I discovered an air corps version of **Frankie and Johnnie**. Remember Frankie and Johnnie? It was ribald and raw, but oh what a swing it could give you as you plodded along a dusty road under a fifty pound pack, plus a rifle and a gas mask and all the impedimenta of a soldier. The 1944 version ends this way:

So, Frankie, she got a new pilot,  
A pilot who knew how to love

(Continued on page 24)

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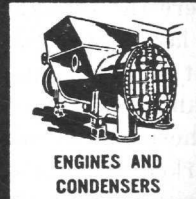
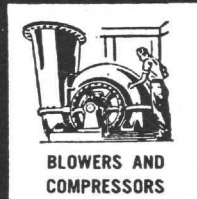
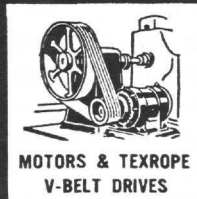
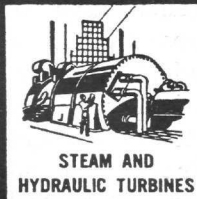
Among the first pieces of equipment to land on island beach-heads, they have helped beat the Japs to the punch time after time.



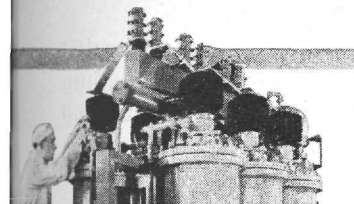
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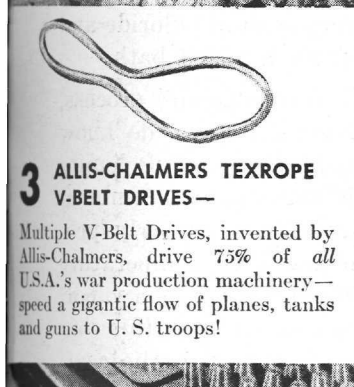


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he is referred to quite modestly as **Brooklyn's Gift to the Army**. What a man! What a gift! Maybe he is the gift what came on the Tree that Grows in Brooklyn.

And there are songs about "G. I. Joe" with his complaints about K. P., the sergeant, his food, his coffee, his shoes, et cetera as E. E. Cummins would say . . . And so in his many disguises, is "Joe College in Khaki" and the "Army Chair Corps." The Paratroopers have a song of their own, as do the Engineers. They are all there. What a collection!

The G. I. SONGS may not be great literature, but they are lusty and gay, and they are full of high spirits; and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if future historians found them of invaluable reference use in analyzing the psychology of Pvt. G. I. Joe. I would rather have the historians make an estimate than to put the job in the hands of the psychologists. Imagine what Dr. George W. Crane could do to Johnny Doughboy after reading G. I. SONGS! His would be a field day!

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According to observations made by Dr. Harlan True Stetson, radio reception varies with the phases of the moon. Dr. Stetson, director of the laboratory for cosmic terrestrial research at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, has found in more than 20,000 hours of laboratory observation that radio reception is at its best from the time of the moon's first quarter to shortly before the full moon. No such effect was found in the dark of the moon, when no rays from the moon could reach the earth's surface.

In an explanation of this phenomenon, Dr. Stetson asserted that the sun, it is believed, is emitting rays of high energy similar to the X-rays. These rays are stopped by the outer atmosphere of the earth, creating what we know as the ionosphere. The moon, however, has no atmosphere. Therefore it is believed that when these rays strike the moon's surface they cause the moon to emit electrons, thus producing the photoelectric effect so familiar to the physical laboratory worker.

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## BOOKSHELF

(Continued from page 17)

They swore they'd be true to each other  
As true as the stars up above—  
She was his gal, but she done him wrong.

Then this for a final verse, the same old story,  
but oh what fun:

Poor Johnnie went off to the prison  
And carried a ball and a chain  
Because he had bumped off his colonel  
For trying to pick up his Jane—  
She was his gal, but she done him wrong.

Of course **Mademoiselle** and **Madelon** were the toasts of War One. In G. I. SONGS you not only meet them again but also you meet the new gals: **Stella the Belle of Fedela**, and **Gertie from Bizerte**. You also will meet a sailor named Casanova O'Reilley who is known to the men of the sea as **The Pride of the Fleet**. You will meet another character who has a certain way with the women;